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# THE STAR OF THE EAST

ക്രിസ്തീയ മാസിക

an ecumenical journal dealing  
specially with the oriental and  
eastern orthodox churches.

P. O. Box 98, Kottayam—686 001, Kerala, India.

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SOPHIA CENTRE, ORTHODOX SEMINARY, P. B. 98,  
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## **Interpreting the One and the Many**

We are publishing in this issue some of the papers presented at an all-India seminar of theological teachers on Hermeneutics held at the Sophia Centre, Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam, in September 1980. The seminar tried to focus on the major issues in modern discussions on hermeneutics from a particularly Christian perspective and in the specifically Indian context.

Traditionally interpretation of events and documents of the past is the proper subject of hermeneutics. The temporal and the cultural distance between the present and the past events and texts constitutes what is called the hermeneutical problem. Hermeneutical theories attempt in different ways to resolve this problem. In the Christian context, biblical texts used to be the chief object of interpretation and understanding. This did not differ much from the elucidation of exegetical principles and method.

However, in recent times hermeneutics have acquired a much wider perspective. Also it has become clear that it is not always necessarily a question between the past and the present, but that we are in need of interpretation and understanding within the present and between the various layers within the same culture. It is quite obvious that unilinear and monocultural understanding of history and historical documents results only in distorted and rather simplistic interpretations.

Within the same period and apparently same cultural milieu there is an enormous variety of sub-cultures and mutually exclusive identities. Increasingly they tend to assert themselves. This would appear to be a paradox of our times. There is an ever increasing effort on religious, political and social levels to arrive at some kind of unity and agreement. There is an equally powerful and opposite trend towards disagreement and divergence. Neoethnic revivals, emergence of new linguistic and cultural identities, self-affirmation of till now suppressed minority groups of all kinds etc. bear witness to this powerful process towards multiplicity. Pluralism has been recognized as not antithetical to the constant effort to unity.

Dominant philosophies whether in classical Greece or in India tried to ignore the problem of plurality by absolutely concentrating on the One or *advaita*. Plurality belongs to the world of senses. Thus it has the character of 'appearance' which passes away. No real understanding comes from it. True understanding lies beyond the transient forms and images created by the senses. The sensible world is not worthy of serious attention or a concerted effort to interpret its significance. This view dies hard.

However, no Christian hermeneutics can legitimately ignore this world of ever increasing multiplicity. The world of senses and

matter makes constant and consistent demands on Christian hermeneutics because of the latter's faith-commitment to the incarnate Christ.

Affirmation of faith in the incarnate God does not mean that understanding of the reality of God and the created reality is complete in any way. Understanding simply begins here with no predestined end in view. The inscrutable depth of the Being of God has lent depth and complexity to the created order. The interpretative and understanding faculty of human beings is constantly challenged by the inexhaustible mystery of reality. Therefore interpretation becomes a major task involved in our Christian commitment; it is an unceasing process as well.

In the Christian tradition interpretation has been considered to be a gift of the Holy Spirit. Though the Pauline question "are all interpreters"? (I Cor. 12: 31), is asked in a special sense, it is true that there are people specially gifted with the power to discern the real significance of things and events and therefore to interpret. However, one test St. Paul offers for the authenticity of the interpretation is *oikodome* or building up of the community.

The process of building up makes use of the diverse elements in our pluralistic world. The apparent conflict among them is resolved through their proper incorporation into the body of the great community of God, which embraces the whole order of creation. The original creation of the world by the will of God and its final fulfilment are the two poles between which the simultaneous processes of multiplication and unification, individualization and incorporation take place.

Today there is a better appreciation of the role of the community and tradition in hermeneutics along with a new understanding of the subject-object relationship. This change in attitude and understanding will open up new possibilities for hermeneutics. No simplistic distinction between individual and the community, subject and object is any longer possible. All new interpretations bear the mark of the cumulative tradition of the community and all so-called objective understanding is deeply shaped by the subjective apprehensions.

Interpretation is a creative activity and understanding happens only through a creative act. The emphasis of the Christian tradition on *praxis* as the ground of *theoria* is to be understood in this sense. A static mode of understanding does not need any new interpretation. A dependable test for the authenticity of an interpretation is whether it creates dynamic understanding. The created reality is inexorably moving to its *telos*. Interpretation and understanding of this reality are necessarily dynamic and creative. There is an ever deepening complexity and diversity and an all-enveloping sense of unity in any genuine interpretation of this reality.

K. M. G.

# Issues in Hermeneutical Discussion in the West\*

## SOME NOTES

(PAULOS GREGORIOS)

### Introduction

No exhaustive treatment of the general hermeneutical discussion can be attempted here—but three general remarks are in order:

(a) There is considerable difference in level and scope between the general secular hermeneutical discussion, and the debate on Biblical hermeneutics as such. The pre-suppositions of Biblical hermeneutics are seldom discussed at a sufficiently deep philosophical level by Christians. Even Paul Ricoeur and Wolfhart Pannenberg are philosophically unsatisfactory.

(b) The most interesting hermeneutical discussions are taking place outside the English speaking world. The German discussion and the debate within Marxist circles are of considerable interest to Christians.

(c) The only vigorous philosophy in the west today is the philosophy of Science (Existentialism, Phenomenology and Linguistic Philosophy have all lost their vitality as general systems. Structuralism is still espoused but has begun to lose productivity. Marxist philosophy is still creative, but literature in western languages is scant.) An understanding of the major issues in the philosophy of science is of great importance for general hermeneutics.

### I. THE MAJOR ISSUES

#### (a) Understanding and Explanation

Hermeneutics consists of two movements—(a) Understanding and (b) Explanation<sup>1</sup>. The two movements are closely inter-related, but not identifiable. Understanding (*Verstehen*) is distinguished from

\* Paper read at National Consultation on Hermeneutics, Kottayam, 1980.

1. Usually German thought distinguishes between *Erklaeren* and *Verstehen* in terms of *explaining* as the goal of the physical science and *understanding* as the goal of the human sciences.

Explanation (*Erklaerden*), in that the latter (E) is possible only from the former (U) and has as its purpose also U. In other words Explanation is a process that comes from a person who understands, and communicates his or her understanding to other person or persons in order that the latter may understand. Understanding is thus the beginning and end of explanation.

G. H. von Wright is by far the most prolific writer on this subject, and his book *Explanation and Understanding* (London, 1971) is a comprehensive treatment of the subject. In German, W. Stegmüller's *Wissenschaftliche Erklaerung und Begründung*, Berlin, Heidelberg, New York, 1974 is also very comprehensive. The Finnish author R. Tuomela also has a book on *Explanation and Understanding*, Helsinki (1976)?

There is something to be explained (*explanandum*) because it is not understood. The explanation (*explanans*) or the set of statements which gives laws, reasons or meanings, is for the purpose of making the matter understood.

Usually explanations can be in terms of general laws (hence called L) generalizations or regularities ("the sun always sets in the west") or initial conditions present ("there was a storm blowing"), which may be called I.

Two different types of explanations can be mentioned:

(1) **Deductive explanations.** Here the conclusion (C) follows logically from L or I.

e. g. **Explanandum:** The apple fell on his head.

**Explanans.** Apples are held to the apple-branch by a stem (L); the stem becomes weak as an apple grows riper (L); rocking of an apple can make a weak stem break (L); there was a wind blowing (I); when an apple-stem breaks and the apple is unsupported it falls to the ground (L) (if you ask why here, another explanation about the law of gravity would be necessary; but generally people do not ask for several of these explanatory sentences, because they know them or take them for granted); he was sitting under the tree in the line of the apple's fall (I).

∴ The apple fell on his head

In this example all the sets of explanatory sentences are either L or I. Strict scientific explanation is supposed to belong to this category. Explanations of archaeological finds, ancient documents etc., also generally fall within this category.

(2) **Functional or Purposive explanations.** These relate to intention or purpose rather than to L or I.

e.g. **Explanans:** "15 people are standing in a straight line on the side of the road."

**Explanation** (normally sufficient): They are waiting in line at a bus stop, waiting for the bus.

Other explanations are necessary here also, which belong to the category L or I. For example, that the bus usually stops at this particular point on the road (L); that standing in line is useful for getting into the bus in a regulated way (L) etc., etc.,

**Second example:** **Explanans:** A borrowed Rs. 50,000 from the bank.

**Explanation:** He wanted to construct a house.

In all these cases the explanation answers the questions: why? what for? how? All explanations normally belong to these two categories—causal or functional. There are many variations. For example, a causal explanation may be logically or factually incorrect, but plausible or probable e. g. "He has cancer because he smokes" .. In this case what is established is only that those who smoke are more likely to have cancer than those who do not. But people are often satisfied with the explanation that somebody has cancer because he smokes. Quite often many explanations in psychology, history and biblical hermeneutics are of this kind.

(b) The second set of problems are methodological in character. Questions like

- i. What does it mean to know something?
- ii. How do we know?
- iii. How do we gain certainty that what we know is true?

These are tough, but perennial questions; they seem metaphysical and remote; they are not; these are the key questions of life, of culture, of faith, of religion, of existence itself.

Take Jean-Paul Sartre, as an example for the study of these questions. In 1943 he published his *Being and Nothingness* which made individual freedom the absolute criterion of all knowledge and certainty. In 1960 he changed or developed his thought. His *Critique of Dialectical Reason* sought to provide a carefully worked out social and political philosophy analyzing the relationship of a human being to social groups, to history, to nation and culture. He abandoned his existentialist stand, and individual freedom was no

longer absolute<sup>1</sup>. He now thinks that Truth is (a) in process of becoming in history, and (b) to be apprehended as a totality of all reality and not simply as individual being.

Reason is a relation between Being and Knowing, a dialectical relation in continuous historical becoming, both being and knowing continuously changing and developing.

In order to understand these questions more deeply we need to see the problem that has plagued western philosophy since the days of David Hume (1711–1776) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). The question is the relation between phenomena and noumena—the thing which appears, and the thing which is conceived in the mind, or world and consciousness—the world “as it is”, and the world as it is in consciousness.

If knowledge is basically part of the relationship between humanity and world, then we must first specify what place knowledge has inside that relationship, what kinds of knowledge there are, and what this knowledge achieves.

Knowledge is certainly not the whole of humanity's relationship to the world. It is part of that relationship. There are other aspects. It is this world which has *produced* humanity (leaving aside for the moment the Christian perspective on both humanity and world as the creation of God). Humanity and world exist in a relation in which humanity itself would appear to be caused, originated, evolved, by the world. No understanding of the world by humanity which ignores the fact of its own origination, causation, evolution, and formation, would be reliable. The *being* of humanity is integral to the being of the world (or the created order, for Christians), and no knowing would be possible if the world had not engendered humanity. Being, not only of the world as known object, but also of humanity as knowing subject, is an important consideration in any theory of knowledge.

Equally important is the aspect of *doing* in the relation of humanity to the world. Knowledge is gathered in the process of doing—i. e. touching, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, but also holding, turning, breaking, making, taking apart, putting together, fighting, loving, killing etc., A child does not gather knowledge by simply turning his *tabula rasa* mind towards reality and holding it like a

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, Eng. Tr. by Hazel Barnes, Vintage Books, New York, 1968. (The original is the preparatory essay “Question de Methode,” in *Critique de la Raison Dialectique* Vol: I, Gallimard, 1960.

mirror, waiting for the world to make its bombardment of sense-impressions, then reason coming in to sort out the sense impressions or to weave them, through categories supplied by the mind, into something called concepts, which the child later converts into language and then communicates to others. Modern writers like Jean Piaget have shown clearly that the development of consciousness, including the categories the child uses to perceive reality and make sense of it, is a process conditioned by cultural factors. No such thing like a human mind can develop without cultural factors shaping and moulding the very framework of perception.

The weakness of English-speaking hermeneutics is that they discuss it only in terms of language, i. e. as a thinking and speaking problem, largely ignoring the questions of being and doing.

In our Indian tradition we generally attach primary importance to the question of *being*, and the deepest question is not so much about the known object and its relation to the knower and to the knowledge; the focus is on the *identity of the knower*. In Advaita Vedanta, the total identity of the knower and Being (Brahman) is affirmed along with the identity of the object also with the same Brahman. This involves the regarding of ordinary subject-object knowledge as imperfect knowledge and only transcendent knowledge (paravidya) as fully valid knowledge. The west, and most of us trained in the western system, have difficulty accepting this position.

Marxist theories of knowledge take a different line. They also ask the questions of being and doing in a very profound way. The being of the knower is all important in determining the shape and validity of his knowledge. They place the knowing subject within the sum-total of reality, as produced by the process of dialectical development, and identify his perspective in terms of his class identity and interest.

Marxism insists also on doing as an essential aspect of true knowledge. Praxis alone can give theory a true perspective, and a constant dialectic between theory and practice is a necessary condition for the right development of both.

The German discussion has proceeded in the context of the debate between Hans-Georg Gadamer and Juergen Habermas. This discussion was advanced by a significant contribution from Hans-Otto Apel, who put forward, in the late sixties, his view of the "anthropology of knowledge," as distinct from the psychology or sociology of knowledge. Kant, for example, has postulated certain categories as the conditions for all possible knowledge, pre-supposing the universality of the structure of the human mind, setting forth, in his Critique of Pure Reason, a science of general consciousness

(*Bewusstsein Ueberhaupt*). Apel appeals to the fact that meaning and language are themselves social events, not solipsistic or individual phenomena. Apel's *Erkenntnisanthropologie* includes the structure of the human mind in all its aspects, psychological, socio-logical and anthropological. He proposed three different though related approaches to reality—*Szientistik, Hermeneutik and Ideologiekritik*, and therefore a methodological trichotomy. The first method is for the natural sciences, the second for hermeneutics, and the third for constructive political economy and ideology. Apel argues that human knowledge and dealing with reality cannot be in terms of a "unified science" whose methodology then becomes binding for all knowledge. Gadamer seeks to find a common methodology for all three.

For us Christians this methodological distinction, not current in English-speaking circles, is of the utmost importance. In systematic theology as well as in N. T. studies, we are in a situation where the emphasis on scientific method is taking away attention from the content, and seeking to shift the ground of authority of the Bible from Revelation to Reason.

Apel argues that the scientific method of the natural sciences and the hermeneutic method of the human sciences cannot be identical, but complementary to each other. Disagreeing at this point with both Wittgenstein and Popper, Apel argues that the method of the natural sciences is reductionist; useful only when our interest is in observing nature in terms of general laws, but not sufficient for dealing with culture—or the human sciences. Neither does he think that the "historical method" of "understanding" as set out by Schliermacher, Droysen and Dilthey sufficient for the natural sciences. In the natural sciences the subject-object relation is what brings knowledge; in the human sciences it is a subject-subject relation—the understanding of other persons' minds and purposes.

But the second process, the process of inter-subjectivity, is also important in the physical sciences. Human existence and knowledge take place in a community of communication. The physical scientist has to construct a theory and explain to his colleagues how the theory is confirmed by experience. So also the human scientist cannot ignore the objective element. The two are complementary the subjective and the objective, in Scientistics and Hermeneutics, says Apel.

He also suggests that there is a third process, which operates through a dialectic between scientistics and hermeneutics; this is ideological criticism or Ideologiekritik. In scientistics, the epistemological interest is in technologically useful knowledge of nature;

in hermeneutics, the interest is in the inter-subjective understanding of life-motivations and actions. But with scientific knowledge and hermeneutical historical understanding man proceeds beyond to make his own history and culture through socio-political action, by facing reality even when it fails to make complete sense either scientifically or hermeneutically. Sometimes one has to suspend hermeneutical understanding of the other because the other is regarded as an enemy and a threat. No full intersubjective understanding is expected between, e. g. judge and culprit, or psychotherapist and patient. Socio-political as well as other action is often based on imperfect inetrsubjectivity and defective objectivity.

Juergen Habermas is suspicious of such trichotomous classifications; he suspects that they (Apel and Gadamer) are simply trying to rescue the human sciences from the crisis in the physical sciences. For Habermas, Gadamer is a Neo-kantian from Marburg, trapped in the Existential ontology of Heidegger\*. Both Kant and Heidegger, for Habermas, are too individualistic in their understanding of the human mind.

But Gadamer and Habermas agree that the knowing subject's historical location, or effective historical identity (*wirkungsgeschichte*) as well as the cultural and linguistic tradition in which he himself stands, fundamentally affect his understanding of a document or a historical event. Habermas would accuse Gadamer of being neo-kantian in the sense that Gadamer still sees the human mind of the knowing subject as too disinterested and individualistic and does not see the distortion caused by class interest in all he rmeneutical interpretation, according to Habermas.

What are the main issues in this German language debate? Here is a quick summary:

1. It is generally recognized that totally impersonal objectivity is unachievable in any science—whether in physics or mathematics.
2. It is generally recognized that knowledge is always a linguistic event. Very seldom does one see any questioning of this in the western debate.
3. It is generally agreed in the west that truth is also basically a quality of propositions. What is true or false is always a statement. One very seldom hears this view questioned.
4. There is general agreement that truth that is value-free, or culture-free does not exist; that language itself is a cultural creation and conditions the ideas expressed through it.

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\* *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik*. Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977. p. 55.

5. It is generally agreed that there is no knowledge which is completely free from the subjective element. The structure of our mind conditions the knowledge yielded. Because all knowledge is held by a subject or put down by a subject, even the knowledge stored in books is not totally objective, pace Popper.

6. Objectivity can be used only in the sense of certain statements being subject to independent testing by others than the person making the statement. The rules for testing are arrived at by an intuitive process which cannot be exhaustively formulated in terms of rules.

7. All knowledge including knowledge in the physical sciences, is gathered through fore-knowledge; i. e. Popper is right in asserting that the scientist has a hunch about a possible hypothesis; he works it out into a conjecture, puts the conjecture to the test by a properly devised experiment, corrects the conjecture where necessary, puts forward his conjecture and his experimental results to the scientific community. No scientific theory is directly yielded by the data observed; it is a creation of the mind which it then uses, after testing, to understand the data.

8. This idea of knowledge through fore-knowledge which is then projected to reality and tested, applied also to historical or hermeneutical knowledge. All historical explanations—of documents, persons, events, etc., are of conjectural nature, guesses put out as possible ways of understanding historical reality. The Bible cannot also be understood without such conjectural hypotheses. Neither can the person of Jesus Christ, nor the events of his life—Crucifixion and Resurrection be understood without subjective hypotheses.

9. It is possible, as we know from physical science, to advance two contradictory hypotheses, and to find partial confirmation for both at the same time. For example light can be understood either as particle or as wave. Each view is partially right, and there is a complementarity between the two ways of knowing and understanding the same phenomenon—light. Ultimately we know that light cannot be fully understood—even in physical reality there is always an ununderstood residuum. This may apply all the more to the phenomenon of Christ, or the Bible, or the Sacraments.

10. This also means that while an event may have come to an end, the understanding of it never comes to an end. There is no final and inflexible understanding of any event. Here Gadamer tells us that the old idea that in historical understanding the ideal is to become the contemporary of an event or identify oneself across the gap of time with a contemporary observer of the event is a totally

false ideal. One does not gain a greater understanding of Christ by identifying oneself with one of the Pharisees, or one of the crowd, or a Roman soldier who was contemporary to the event. Contemporariety is not the essential to historical understanding. In fact an event is better understood many years later, when the consequences of the event have become more evident and when more data have been gathered in one place from different sources. Historical understanding demands some identification with the horizons of contemporaries to the event; but one does not leave one's own horizon (horizon is determined by what one is able to see from where one stands—by one's culture, training, skills etc.,) to enter the contemporary's horizon. What one actually does is to fuse one's horizon with the reconstructed horizons of as many different contemporaries of an event as possible. As our effective horizon (*wirkungsgeschichte* in the terminology of Gadamer) changes, our understanding of an event also changes. This is of crucial importance in Biblical Hermeneutics.

11. If as we have stated in (7), all knowledge is based on fore-knowledge, and a tentative pre-judgment is the tool we use for gaining new knowledge, then when we find that our pre-judgment is not confirmed by experience, we have to take a new look at our pre-judgment to see what is wrong with it. Once again we have to try several hypotheses or prejudices about what went wrong with our original pre-judgment which led us astray. In Biblical hermeneutics, it is necessary to see what are the pre-judgments which previous interpreters have used to explain a passage, and the current interpreter has to look at as many previous interpretatory pre-judgments as possible, in order to see the defect of each, and then devise one's own interpretative pre-judgment which can yield more satisfactory results. This process must go on always; but there is no guarantee at all that a new interpretation is always better than the old one.

12. Gadamer has clearly shown us that Tradition is an essential element in all hermeneutic acts. In the first place it is a certain community tradition that has produced a document, copied and recopied it, and not only maintained it but also witnessed to its importance by recognizing the value of its being copied and recopied and handed down.<sup>1</sup> The literary history of the document and the importance we give to it are all part of its interpretation. This applies to scientific as well as religious literature, as well as artistic or literary works. Tradition has other roles also in interpretation.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 143.

2. The Western *Enlightenment* as an attempt to break with Tradition by depending on Reason alone is now seen to be a colossal failure as far as the desire to break with Tradition is concerned. The failure of Diltheyan historicism is part of that failure—See Gadamer op. cit. pp. 244 ff.

13. The written word has the special quality that, unlike the spoken word which is always accompanied by helps to communication like inflection, subliminal modes of feeling-expression, and emphasis, the work of interpretation is almost entirely the burden of the understanding mind. Of course there are other advantages like objectifiability and greater analyzability to the written word. Hermeneutics of the written word is a much greater challenge to the interpreter.

14. But the interpretation of the written word is also not possible without some form of prejudice or pre-judgment. It is by presupposing that the particular text must reflect a particular context or situation involving the person who wrote and the persons to whom it was addressed, and by tentatively reconstructing that context and the meaning of certain words and expressions in that context, that we seek to understand a text. The prejudice against prejudice is itself an inheritance from the Enlightenment. So is the notion that there is one objective interpretation of any particular Biblical text that is final and unrevisable. All interpretation involves the risk of error,<sup>1</sup> because interpretation is based on prejudice. Gadamer then shifts the fundamental question of hermeneutics to the problem:

“Thus we are able to formulate the central question of a truly historical hermeneutics, epistemologically its fundamental question namely: Where is the ground of the legitimacy of prejudices? What distinguishes legitimate prejudices from all the countless ones which it is the undeniable task of the critical reason to overcome.”<sup>2</sup>

It is this false opposition between Reason and Tradition which needs to be further examined in the discussion of Hermeneutical Principles. Here the question of authority becomes central. How do we maintain any notion at all of authority if freedom is a genuine value? What is the authority of Reason and what is the authority of Tradition in interpreting reality? Are either of these fixed norms?

If European Romanticism conceived tradition as the antithesis of the freedom of reason, and therefore Reason as a legitimate alternative to Tradition, where do we Indians stand on this business of our own notions of authority, reason and freedom? The Indian notions of authority, our Pramanavacara, needs a fresh look. I hope this consultation will give attention to this question in the light of our own culture.

1 Gadamer says: “The overcoming of all prejudices, this global demand of the Enlightenment, will prove to be itself a prejudice, the removal of which opens the way to an appropriate understanding of our finitude, which dominates not only our humanity, but also our historical consciousness.” *op. cit.* p. 244.

2 Gadamer *op. cit.* p. 246.

There is a new recognition of the role of Tradition in the growth of scientific knowledge. If Science grows by a cumulative process (*a la* Popper) as well as by a revolutionary Paradigm change (*a la* Kuhn), then we must know what is normative and what is open in Tradition.

15. There is also the recognition that science cannot be understood by analyzing the psychology of the individual scientist; neither can it be understood by a further study of the sociology of the scientific community within which knowledge is confirmed, communicated, conserved and even created. We need to know both the psychology of science and the sociology of knowledge; to analyze the role of both Tradition and community in knowledge. All these are important for Biblical Hermeneutics also. But distinctive for Christian Hermeneutics is Pneumatology the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

#### Some questions:

1. What is the Role of the Holy Spirit, in relation to Tradition (which includes scripture) and Community (without which there is no Tradition), in Christian Hermeneutics? This question has its counter-part in the secular discussion about Creativity in Science. For us we must discuss the Role of the Spirit in relation to the secular understanding of Creativity.
2. Is all understanding linguistic or verbal or conscious? Do sacraments bring any knowledge or understanding? What about silence?
3. What difference is there in the notion of a human being in Marxist thought and in Christian thought and is this difference significant for hermeneutics?



# **Some Reflections on an Indian-Christian Theological Hermeneutic\***

**(DR. C. DURAISINGH—Bangalore)**

(Note: In the light of the time that this paper is scheduled in the consultation, it was suggested by the Organizing Secretary that it would be good if the paper could incorporate and address various issues and insights raised in other papers as well as in our discussions. Therefore, in the following pages certain sections are intentionally left sketchy for development during the consultation itself. However, the last section, where I attempt to make proposals of my own, has been developed more fully.)

## **Introduction**

By hermeneutics I do not imply various techniques of interpreting texts—sacred or otherwise. Therefore our concern is not to consider what we should or should not do in order to establish accurately the original meaning that the author of the text might have intended. But by hermeneutics we identify a process by which an interpreter or a community of interpretation comes to 'stand under' the emergent meaning and significance (meaningfulness—vide Fr. D'sa's paper) that comes to expression as the 'horizon' of the interpreter and that of the text intersect and fuse together.

In such a hermeneutical process, the emergent meaning always transcends what either the text or the interpreter brings to the process of understanding. Our Indian seers seem to have been aware of the phenomenon of understanding. They were always after the 'meaningfulness', the very subject matter that was 'heard' through the text and were never satisfied with the mere 'sense of the text.' It is the 'inner meaning', the 'heart of all *sastras*', that was their passion.

While the hermeneutical process may involve some methodologically disciplined use of reason on arriving at some knowledge of various contextual determinants of the text in question, hermeneutics itself is more inclusive. It goes beyond the task of mere language analysis or elucidation of the historical co-efficient of the context of the text. It leads ultimately to an inclusive understanding of the

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\* Paper read at the National Consultation on Hermeneutics, Kottayam, 1980

interpreter of himself as bearing by the very text or tradition that he seeks to understand. Or as Hans-Georg Gadamer puts it, hermeneutics is not a problem of the science or method of interpretation, but rather a part of 'the total human experience of the world.'<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the historicality of the interpreter is essential for the hermeneutical process. Or in other words, the primordial relation of the interpreter to life itself is a crucial element for any valid understanding.

Hermeneutics is ontological, since it brings about a newer dimension of self-understanding in the interpreted and hence newness of being. It is historical, since it is rooted in the temporal co-efficients that make up the life-world of the interpreter. It is primarily linguistic since the primary mode of being of the tradition interpreted is textual. It is praxiological since the search for 'meaning' and meaningfullness arises out of the relation and involvement of the interpreter to life itself.

Our collective search for constructive directions for an Indian-Christian hermeneutics may be undertaken around three foci:

- (1) the Indian-Christian *hermeneutical context* involving our search for our historicality and identity or authenticity.
- (2) the Indian-Christian *hermeneutical goal, concerns and principle*, involving our search for goals and contextual relevance as we are praxiologically involved in the total Indian life today.
- (3) the Indian-Christian *hermeneutical process*, involving some reflections on the phenomenon and process that we may observe in ourselves as we are caught up in our understanding our text and tradition(s).

Since my intention is to incorporate questions, issues and insights raised during the consultation before the presentation of the paper, I am offering only a frame-work at this point for our reflection.

## I. THE INDIAN-CHRISTIAN HERMENEUTICAL CONTEXT

(i) Question of our historicality as doubly determined by two traditions—Judeao-Christian and Indian—which is predominantly Hindu. The proposal that these two traditions are in a *constitutive* relationship in the formation of all that is Indian-Christian. We are not simply Indians who also happen to be Christians; nor are we Christians, who by accident of birth happen to be also Indians.

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1. *Truth and Method*, New York: Seabury Press, 1976, p. xi.

We are Indian-Christians, hyphenated wholes, wherein both the components of our complex heritage are in wholistic and coalescing relation—the hermeneutical implication of the historicality.

(ii) The role of two traditions—the nature of their inter-relations—*the role of the two scriptural traditions—notions of authority, interrelation between various elements/components in the two coalescing traditions.*

(iii) Tradition—not to be understood as objects that belong to us and that we can master at will—but rather tradition as that to which we belong.

Tradition as trajectory—a movement, a process that carries forward an initial impulse, but in the process may take diverse forms—however there remains an ‘intelligible causal relation between each stage of the trajectory and its succession; but there is no defining characteristic that necessarily reappears exactly in the same form at each stage—The self-understanding of the Indian-Christian as being part of a living trajectory with possibility of novelty and creative thrust at every stage.

(iv) Three elements in the historicality of the Indian-Christian:

(a) Our mnemonic awareness—that is, our earlier relationships and responses to our tradition (s).

(b) Our anticipatory consciousness—our fore-expectation of the hermeneutical goal—as it is initially and ‘corrigibly’ evoked by our new encounter with text and tradition.

(c) Our contextual awareness—or praxiological awareness—the questions that make our text and tradition hermeneutically problematic as we are involved in the liberating, integrating and transforming processes of the socio-cultural and religious world of India today.

It is our spelling out to ourselves the presuppositions, pre-understanding and anticipated goals, that can bring our hermeneutically problematic context in India to focus.

## II. INDIAN-CHRISTIAN HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLE— GOALS AND CONCERNS

(a) Primary distinction between ‘meaningfulness’ or and ‘textual—meaning’ or sense of text—meaningfulness as *constitutive* of our being and hence as ontological whereas the ‘sense text’ only as contributively to the process.

(b) Distinction between 'right' interpretation and 'creative' interpretation.

(c) Quest for relevance—praxiological quest in the Indian socio-cultural and religious ethos for liberating, integrating action—hence the question whether the Indian search for a liberating and integrating 'understanding' of reality can provide our foundational hermeneutic principle.

(d) The hermeneutical circle defined in terms of the Indian-Christian hermeneutical concerns and principle.

(e) Nature of truth and the question of critieria in an Indian-Christian hermeneutics.

### **III. SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE 'PROCESS' OF AN INDIAN-CHRISTIAN HERMENEUTICS**

In the rest of the paper, let me make some observations on what I take to be the hermeneutical process of Indian-Christians. In order to do so, I shall first identify the process of a possible Indian-Christian understanding of a particular theological motif as it emerges at the inter section of the two traditions in confluence. The purpose, however, is not to be exhaustive in expounding the motif but it is rather to illustrate the process of understanding. Therefore, the illustrative presentation will be followed by a mere formal and theoretical reflection upon the hermeneutical process itself.

We shall focus on an Indian-Christian understanding of liberation, *mukti* or salvation. As the Indian-Christian shares the socio-cultural as well as religious ethos of India today, the secret for liberation becomes a praxiological component of his/her existence. The hermeneutical context in India raises the issue of liberation in its varied dimensions and it is within that context the texts and traditions can be listened to.

Further, the hermeneut starts with the fact that there are differences in the ways of understanding the motif of liberation or salvation in the two traditions that he inherits. The Judaeo-Christian tradition, at least in its Protestant version that has been dominant in the Indian-Christian thought, describes salvation primarily in terms of an act of 'reconciliation' of humans with God.<sup>2</sup> Since humans

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2. The Indian-Christian theologian may be familiar with several other theories of salvation and atonement in the history of Judaeo-Christian thought.

have turned away from the intended state of relation with God through wilful disobedience and transgression and thereby have become enemies of God, as it were, it is only through an act of propitiation and reconciling obedience of the mediator, Christ, that humans are again restored to that relation. Various other images from the history of Judaeo-Christian thought such as redemption and deliverance may be used; but underlying all of them lies a juridical thought-form. This image or set of images that arises out of a form of political and juridical structure of thought is unfamiliar to the Indian mind. P. Chenchiah expresses this restlessness so well:

The juridical concept of Christianity is an attempt to reduce Jesus to the ideology of Judaism or the political ideology of the State of Rome: in other words, to interpret Jesus in terms of sacrifice and propitiation or law, offence and punishment.... The Cross may be soul-shattering. Yet, as we accompany Jesus we never get 'the Kalighat'<sup>3</sup> feeling.... No Indian gets this feeling.. The classic theology distorts Jesus.... An attempt to express the meaning of Jesus in terms of these (images).... is not even true to the Indian experience.... I want to emphasize that we can never get to the heart of Christianity by the way of juridical theology.<sup>4</sup>

This sort of restlessness with images that arise out of juridical structures of thought is evident also in H. A. Krishna Pillai. In an autobiographical reminiscence, he reflects on the problems of the days just before his conversion. The most problematic motif in the pietistic German Lutheran theology to which he was exposed in those days was the idea of expiation and juridical justification. He expresses it as follows:

While I clearly understood doctrines such as the Saviour's sacred incarnation, I was greatly perplexed and bewildered, not comprehending how his act of expiation imparts salvation to men.<sup>5</sup>

3 *Kalighat* is a place where blood sacrifices are offered to propitiate the goddess, *Kali*.

4 "The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World," *Rethinking Christianity in India*, G. V. Job et al. (2nd ed., Madras: Hogarth Press, 1939), pp. 164-165.

5 Translated and cited by D. D. Hudson, "Hindu and Christian Theological Parallels in the Conversion of H. A. Krisna Pillai, 1857-1859," *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, 40 (June 1972), p. 196.

Commenting on his perplexity even when he had help from a fellow convert who introduced Krishna Pillai to a literature that graphically described salvation through images of juridical transaction, D. Hudson says, "It does not appear that this juridical mode of thought was convincing to Krishna Pillai, and it may actually have been an obstacle to his understanding."<sup>6</sup> In contrast, it is interesting to take note of the first verse that Krishna Pillai wrote immediately after his conversion. It has no reference to a process of justification through the juridical transaction due to the death of Christ. Instead, it speaks of God releasing his precious life and making him his devotee:

O Sea of Grace, O Sun that dispels the works of Darkness, O God who has released precious life for this your slave, On this occasion when you make a devotee of me, a low wicked fellow not knowing the meaning of Truth, I offer my heart only to you, the form of Dharma.<sup>7</sup> God opened my heart.... and I opened my mouth to praise him!

As Hudson rightly suggests "this, his first poetic composition as a Christian, could have been uttered by a vaishnava."<sup>8</sup> However, he continued to grapple with the doctrine and attempts to understand it.<sup>9</sup>

The point in all this, for our immediate discussion, is that however strange and repugnant the juridical interpretation of the act and experience of reconciliation may be for the Indian-Christian, in so far as it is partly through these images that his Judaeo-Christian heritage has mediated the reality of God's relation to him and his community, he can neither set these images aside as irrelevant nor claim total unfamiliarity to them.

Now on the other side, the dominant Hindu understanding of liberation has been in terms of a self-realization or self-knowledge that ultimately one's self is Brahman itself and all-else has only such a relative reality that in the event of the liberating self-knowledge,

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198

<sup>9</sup> Of course, in the case of Krishna Pillai, the missionary tradition that brought the gospel to the Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu in the late nineteenth century presented the work of Christ only in juridical images. There was no possibility therefore for these early converts to know that within the Christian tradition itself, there are several other possible models to understand Christ's work.

one is released from the binding effects of the contingent and phenomenal world of *samsara*. For an Indian-Christian who understands God primarily as the one who addressed him as 'thou' and is addressed by him, an understanding of salvation purely in terms of self-realization is strange and unfamiliar. Yet it is the tradition out of which he partly understands himself; and hence he cannot set this notion aside as utterly meaningless. Since there is no going beyond his historically given, doubly determined, conceptual framework, he discovers that no mono-polar categories—that is, no categories that arise only out of one tradition—can adequately make sense of the reality he is trying to understand. Therefore, a crisis of images becomes an inevitable experience to him. As a consequence, he actively seeks for a unity of meaning or what we described earlier as a 'fore-expectation of harmony' through which a new understanding of liberation is obtained. It will be a more comprehensive understanding in which both the affirmations of the independent traditions are transcended in a newer unity of meaning.

As the quest for a comprehensive understanding goads the hermeneut forward, it is likely that he will arrive at an understanding of salvation as the self-knowledge that the Divine Self is his true self and therefore what is involved is a process of *recentering* one's separative ego (*ahamkara*) in its only proper Centre. In this sense salvation is both a discovery of one's true self (*ahampathartha*) as well as a restoration of an alienated and estranged relation of oneself from God, his true Centre. In this sense, a comprehensive standpoint is reached where the motifs both of restored relation and of progressive self-knowledge have their place. As the theologian attempts to spell this out further, newer metaphors may emerge.

For the theologian who is directly influenced by the thought of Ramanuja, such as H. A. Krishna Pillai, the Self and its body, i. e., the field (*deha*) or the focus of expression of the Self, will form a central metaphor. Salvation is then, a recentering of one's relationship to God in such a way that the self becomes increasingly aware that it is a field or focal point in and through which the glory (*vibhuti*) and love of its true Self, the divine Self, are adequately expressed in such a way that, in turn, the human self finds its fulfilment. The relation of this liberated self to other selves is also altered.

That the foundational concerns of the motif of liberation in both the traditions function within the emergent understanding must be remembered. For, if the recentering of oneself in the divine Self as its true Self is not understood in terms of reconciled relational categories, that of love and communion, for example, the notion of self-knowledge may be reduced to one of monistic identity. Likewise, if the restored relation is not affirmed as one's relation to one's

only true Self, and hence a recentring, there is a danger of relapsing into dualistic and juridical images that are dominant only in one tradition.

Within such a theology, the role of Christ is not of one that mediates the propitiatory requirements to satisfy a righteous God. Rather, the mediatory potency of Christ is that of a potency of the most decisive paradigm case and unique manifestation in the plane of history of such a radical recentring and self-knowledge. Jesus's acknowledgement of the divine Self as his true Self was so complete and his recentering so maximal that in and through his life, death and continuing presence in the faith of the believing community a potency for the self-realization of the believer as centered in God, his only true self, is released. If in faith an Indian-Christian affirms that in Jesus there was maximal recentring of his self in the divine Self and a complete self-knowledge that his true self was nothing but the divine Self, then it is possible for that theologian to affirm also that the reality of God itself was fully present in Christ. This implies that Christ is not only the decisive *pattern* for all our recentring and self-knowledge, but he is also, in some sense, the decisive mode of *presence* of the 'Self of all' in the plane of time and space. He is God's *vibhava*, the one *in* whom God's splendor and being comes to be seen, comes to be present. But this is not naively to identify the Supreme Self of all and Christ. Rather, it is to affirm with the Judaeo-Christian Paul that "God was *in* Christ reconciling the world to himself," (II Corinthians, 5: 19). One can also say with the author of the letter to the Colossians, "...*in* him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness of life in him," (Colossians 2: 9 and 10). Therefore, our love and loyalty to the reality of Christ does in itself, in some sense, become our act of recentring ourselves in the divine Self. This is so, for Christ is both the decisive *pattern* for our recentring of ourselves in God and the *power* of the fullness of the presence of divine Self in history.

In more familiar terms, the work of Christ, in and through his life, death and risen presence, is not the only occasion for God to forgive and restore the self-centered humans to him once and for all; rather it is the supreme illustration of the ever-relating and ever-restoring love of God *as well as* the decisive releasing of potency for further recentring of humans in their true Self. In this sense, as Bishop Appasamy puts it, Jesus, the "supreme power of God's love which forgives and redeems, exerts its irresistible influence."<sup>10</sup> Hence, it is the entire life of Jesus and not simply his suffering and

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10 *Christianity as Bhakti Marga* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1927), pp. 112-113.

death on the cross that reveals and mediates the potency of God's love and presence.

We can observe analogous processes of theological understanding of the doctrine of salvation or liberation in Chenchiah and Krishna Pillai as well. The strand of Indian heritage that actively determined Chenchiah's mnemonic content is the evolutionary metaphysics of Sri. Aurobindo. In terms of those coalescing traditions, he articulates his understanding of salvation as follows:

Redemption is effected, not by death but by the larger life....  
Salvation is not just sinlessness but lifefulness.<sup>11</sup>

This is so, because what happened on the cross and resurrection is "no happy ending which a sense of justice has invented for a tragedy or woe,"<sup>12</sup> but rather a bringing into being of a new creation. "In Jesus, creation mounts a step higher....Jesus is the origin of the species of the Sons of God."<sup>13</sup> Therefore Christianity, for Chenchiah, cannot be "primarily a doctrine of salvation (in the juridical sense) but the announcement of the advent of a new creative order in Jesus."<sup>14</sup> Jesus is the pattern and spearhead of this new order.

In this struggle with the juridical images and his Vaisnava tradition, Krishna Pillai arrives at an understanding of the work of Christ, in the early days of his conversion, as the work of a great soul who through his good works earns such great merit (*punyaam*) that it is efficacious for all those who trust him and relate themselves to him as their source of merit. Hudson points out that this notion of Christ's merit is not to be confused with similar notions in parts of Protestant thought.

I would suggest that this particular formulation....of the power of Christ's merit resonates of the Indian religious milieu where merit and its power have played an important role for centuries. In Indian thought, all acts bear fruit, and good acts bear merit....<sup>15</sup>

Hudson also suggests that there may be evidence that in the Vaishnava tradition, Ramanuja might have been looked upon as one who has

11 R. H. Boyd, *Indian-Christian Theology*, p. 153.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 155

13 *Ibid.*, p. 150

14 *Ibid.*, p. 154

15 Hudson, "Theological Parallels," p. 204.

stored merits, by his meritorious life and *bhakti*, which his subsequent disciples can draw upon for their liberation.<sup>16</sup>

The above presentation of the understanding of salvation is intended primarily to illustrate the process of Indian-Christian understanding of a doctrine in the context of two coalescing traditions. Hence exhaustive studies of the motif has not been our concern. I shall now attempt to reflect more theoretically upon the process of Indian-Christian theological hermeneutics in terms of the rather sketchy illustrations indicated above.

(i) The first thing to be noted is that the question of liberation is not merely a theoretical one. Nor is it that the Indian-Christian first attempts to know what the 'right' and universal understanding of liberation is and then will apply it. Rather it is a quest that involves the involvement and action of both the hermeneut and his faith community. The question as well as the truth of liberation lie not outside and beyond the concrete relations and historical events in which we are involved. It is in the praxiological context of our involvement in liberating, integrating and transforming our relations with ourselves, the world of things and persons and with their ultimate source of being, our hermeneutical quest arises and proceeds.

(ii) Secondly, in the Indian-Christian hermeneutics there seem to be three significant factors that every hermeneut must take account of. It is in the creative interaction of these three factors, that the hermeneutical process comes to be. First, there are the two different traditions, each with its history and distinct structure. They encounter the hermeneut primarily by their chief mode of being, namely the linguistic expressions such as the sacred texts and their historical interpretations. Therefore, a certain amount of intensive study and knowledge (*vedana*) of the content and history of the respective traditions is crucial. There is no way of avoiding such a careful study. However, it is only a preliminary task and in itself does not constitute theology. Secondly, there is the already acquired relation of the theologian to these two traditions. Much of this anterior relation and accommodation to the two traditions may be only in the private and corporate memory of the community. We have described it as the mnemonic given. It is because of this earlier accommodation to the coalescing traditions that the theologian is able to perceive the situation as hermeneutically problematic, that is, as something that needs to be interpreted. Thirdly, there is what Gadamer calls, the "effective historical relation" to the traditions<sup>17</sup>

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16 *Ibid.*, p. 205

17 H. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 267

It is a relation to the traditions in which the interpreter is historically constituted by the very traditions that he now seeks to interpret and therefore he is a part of the historical process in which they are coalescing together. Hermeneutical process begins and is maintained by the interaction of these three factors. If only the first, namely, the distinct history and structures of the two traditions, is overemphasized, there is the danger of treating the traditions as objects for our conceptual mastery alone; if the second element, i. e., the theologian's anterior relation to the traditions is given exclusive emphasis, then there is the danger of reducing hermeneutical experience to a mere re-experiencing of the past response or accommodation; the theological task may be reduced to a mere subjective projection of the theologian, if only the third element is emphasized at the expense of the other two. In this sense, it is at the juncture of an active interplay of all the three factors that an adequate hermeneutical task of a two-fold tradition may be begun and continued.

(iii) Thirdly, in H. A. Krishna Pillai's struggle for understanding there comes a transformation from a simple relation to the mere 'sense of the text' to a self-involving relation to the subject matter that comes to expression in and through the text. It is at this point, we suggest that there comes to be a 'fore-expectation of meaning' and harmony in the text and tradition. It is when the Indian-Christian theologian's simple relation to both the Hindu and Judaeo-Christian traditions (such as academic curiosity) is turned into a self-involving relation (in which the theologian comes to understand that he and his community are constituted by both the traditions), that there comes an expectation for newer and more comprehensive meaning.

There is a special problem for the Indian-Christian theologian. That is, the Indian-Christian is acutely aware that he is in an "intermediate place between strangeness and familiarity."<sup>18</sup> But this experience of being between strangeness and familiarity has two dimensions. First, it is an experience of being addressed by the traditions as the other, as some one at a distance from the tradition; hence the strangeness. At the same time there is the awareness of being a part of or even a moment in the historical process of tradition itself, and hence a familiarity. This "intermediate place" and the consequent conflict is shared by the Indian-Christian with anyone else who attempts to interpret his tradition such as Ramanuja or Aurobindo for example. But the second dimension is uniquely that of an Indian-Christian. On the one hand, as a Christian, the Hindu tradition is strange and yet, since he belongs to it, it is familiar to

him; on the other hand, as an Indian, he experiences the Judaeo-Christian tradition as strange and yet, in so far as he belongs to it, there is a familiarity with it.

This experience of familiarity as well as strangeness leads the theologian to an active 'fore-expectation of harmony' and 'an immanent unity of meaning.' We have suggested that in both Chenchiah's and H. A. Krishna Pillai's writings also one can speak of such a familiarity and distancing and hence a seeking for unity of meaning and completion. This accords very well with a general hermeneutical principle which Gadamer enunciates that,

"When we read a text (or understand a tradition whose mode of being is linguistic) we always follow this... presupposition of completion, and only when it proves inadequate....we seek to discover in what way it can be remedied."<sup>19</sup>

This quest for a *samanvayat* (harmonization) is consequent upon the experience of both strangeness and familiarity with the two traditions that the Indian-Christian belongs to and that he seeks to understand.

(iv) Our fore-expectation of harmony and completion between conflicting aspects of our dual tradition, leads us to a search for what we may call a "common connotation" or "comprehensive standpoint." An Indian-Christian looks for a comprehensive horizon, a new standpoint, which on the one hand transcends the old horizons of the two coalescing traditions in their isolation and yet, on the other hand, fuses them in such a way that they are taken up into the new.

(v) It is at this point that a new meaning context comes into being. This is the event of authentic understanding of oneself *out of* one's own two traditions. This event of understanding "involves the attainment of a higher universality that overcomes, not only our own particularity, but also the particularity of the other."<sup>20</sup> This is neither a naive assimilation of elements of the two traditions nor a bringing out of what is best or essential in the past into the present in an artificial manner. But rather, it is an arriving at a larger horizon, as one's immediate present and the potency of the two coalescing traditions interact and are integrated. It is here we come to 'stand-under' distinctly and immediately what Fr. D'sa calls in his paper the 'meaningfullness,' the very *atman* of our doubly determined text and tradition.

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19 *Ibid.*, p. 261

20 *Ibid.*, p. 272

(vi) It is out of this new understanding of the traditions and the self-understanding of oneself as being constituted by the traditions, that newer metaphors emerge by which the theologian then defines God, world, humanity and their inter-relation adequately and meaning fully in the new experiential context.

Through more elaborate development of Indian-Christian understanding of several theological motifs than the one we have presented above and through systematic and theoretical reflections upon them, the hermeneutical process identified above can further be established. It can also be demonstrated that a theology that emerges through such a hermeneutical process will be comprehensive enough to be valued as meaningful to those involved in both the Judaeo-Christian and Hindu traditions severally as well. That is to say, the understanding of the Indian-Christian would have reached such a width and integration that both former traditions may find significant family resemblance in it. There would be new shapes of meaning, of course, for the Indian-Christian, for, his horizon is an integrated one. But both the constituting traditions will at least recognize the realities identified in and through the new metaphors. Panikkar, reflecting upon the possibility of such a growth in the understanding of any faith community, says,

Growth means continuity and development, but it also means transformation and revolution. Growth does not exclude mutation; on the contrary, there are moments even in the biological realm when only a real mutation can account for further life.<sup>21</sup>

As mutations they become concrete events in the ongoing process of Indian-Christian understanding/self-understanding. Such ontic events are also linguistic and historical. They arise out of our social, cultural and religious praxis and in turn can shape our collective transforming action in India today.

21 R. Panikkar, Dialogue, p. 72

# **'Hermeneutics in the Indian Context'**

**Dr. V. C. SAMUEL**

## **TRADITION, COMMUNITY AND HERMENEUTICS**

One of the methods adopted by the early Church in defending and promoting itself was to adduce scriptural authority. This was done as much to establish its credibility as a community as to vindicate the legitimacy of its traditions. Beginning as it did practically *de novo* on the proclamation that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, the Church had to work out an approach in its self-defence, which in fact it did. All those who accepted the proclamation regarding Jesus joined the Apostolic community, which developed its traditions within the cultural setting of their time and life. Thus from the beginning of the Church, the community, its traditions and the scripture went together as forming a totality.

In itself the community is the concrete expression of the life in harmony of individual persons committed to a faith and ideal. It has the inward aspect of healthy relationship that binds the individuals together subjectively, and the external aspects of conformity to certain patterns of behaviour followed objectively. Traditions belong to the latter and are intended to promote the former. Viewed in this way, it is possible to say that traditions are developed by the community in order to conserve its twofold character. Some communities claims to receive authority from scripture. "Inspired by God and profitable for teaching," the scripture belongs to the community, which interprets it for the promotion of its preaching and teaching work. The community, then, and its traditions are prior to the scripture. Though the scripture does not change, the hermeneutic work built on it is likely to undergo development bringing out deeper understanding of its meaning and application.

In this paper a very tentative attempt is made to discuss briefly how this development has taken place in the Church and what responsibility can the Indian Church undertake legitimately to continue the process with reference to itself.

## 1. The Apostolic Community and its Hermeneutics

The Apostolic community had our Old Testament as its scripture. Conformity with it in areas where the Church saw common ground between the old and the new, and the idea of fulfilment in areas where the new made significant departure from the old, were the two ways in which the early Church made use of the Old Testament scripture. To accomplish both these tasks the early Church had recourse to hermeneutics. The areas of common ground between the old and the new need not detain us. As regards the new positions, the point made was that they were not novel, for they had already been foretold or partially revealed, so that a fulfilment or completion of the same was necessary, and that this was possible to be found in the Christian dispensation.

The Old Testament had been produced by the Hebrew people within and for their community, containing the traditions concerning their history, religion and life. The observance of the sabbath, circumcision, and the many aspects of the worship and life in general—all these were based on traditions prevalent in the community. These are noted in the scripture for the guidance of the people. As time passed and the original cultural and social setting in which these had come into vogue underwent change, the Jews themselves undertook hermeneutic work to expound them.

The New Testament is of a different character. Assuming the validity of the Old Testament as scripture, it seeks on the one hand to offer justification for the emergence of the Church, and on the other to give guidance in life and faith to those who became members in the Christian community. In fulfilling this task, the New Testament interprets the Old Testament in a significant way with reference to a number of issues.

The new community which produced the New Testament claimed continuity with, and fulfilment of, the old community. The reference in the *Didache* to the weekly fast of the Christian community is a case in point in this respect. "Let not your fasts be with the hypocrites," it says referring to the Jews; "for they fast on the second and fifth days of the week; but do ye fast on Wednesdays and on the Preparation" (i.e. preparation for the sabbath which is Friday). The early Christian community took over from the tradition adopted by devout Jews of our Lord's time the customs of fasting on two days a week, namely on Mondays and Thursdays. But the days were changed to Wednesdays and Fridays, in commemoration of our Lord's passion and crucifixion. For the Christian community, then, Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection were the fundamental point of departure from the old.

There was another factor also that played an important role in the formation of the Christian Church. Though it began in a Jewish milieu, it gradually moved away from its original cradle and adopted the Graeco-Roman social and cultural setting as its context. This resulted in its adoption of traditions implying further departure from the religious and spiritual heritage of the Hebrew people. The movement in this direction had already started among the Jews even before the advent of Christianity. The Jews of the diaspora, particularly the Alexandrine Jews, had begun the work of confronting the Greek intellectual and cultural setting of those times in commanding their religious life. They had produced the LXX translation of the Old Testament, which the early Church acknowledged as its scripture. It is a fact however that the Church which moved into the Graeco-Roman world was careful not to take over any new scripture, but it adapted its hermeneutics to justify the adjustments which it made with the new environments. Thus the Orthodox-Catholic Christian Church took its shape by adopting two departures from the religious heritage of the Old Testament. The central point in them was indeed the proclamation concerning Jesus Christ—"a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles." To commend him to both the Jew and the Gentile was the one pre-eminent concern of the Church.

The first of these departures consisted in the transition from the old into the new. The second was not strictly speaking a transition, but a movement into the Mediterranean world with the Gospel. As regards the first of the two departures, a number of points were made by the Christian community to relate its message to the Old Testament.

**His Coming was foretold:** The New Testament community assumed that the Jews had anticipated the coming of the Messiah, and that this expectation was fulfilled in Jesus. All the three synoptic Gospels note in this respect Malachi: 3.1: 'Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.' The synoptic gospels take the words, "Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way for me" as a prophecy concerning John the baptist. He was to be sent as a messenger to prepare the way for the Messiah. This Messiah whose coming is prophesied has appeared in Jesus of Nazareth. The question whether Malachi was in fact offering such a prophecy, or whether he was so understood in the Jewish community was not raised. The assumption may well have been that if they had not so understood it, they were not seeing the truth. What was unclear in the words was supplied by hermeneutics.

**His Birth from the Virgin Mother was foretold:** The Messiah came. A number of signs indicated his advent. One such sign was his supernatural birth. This the community claimed to have been foretold by prophet Isaiah. The Gospel of Matthew, written with the Jews specially in mind, is careful to note this fact. Taking over Is. 7: 14 from the LXX translation where the Hebrew *halmah* is rendered as *parthenos*, the Gospel proclaims the tradition of the early Church that the Messiah Jesus was born of a human mother who had had no male cooperation for her conception. Is. 7: 14 is taken here as a prophecy concerning the birth of the Messiah. We see that the Christian community adopted its hermeneutics in defence of a tradition which it had concerning the supernatural birth of its Lord.

**His Death as a redemptive event had been foretold:** Can God's Messiah die? The answer has to be "No." But Jesus was crucified as a criminal of those ancient times. This fact however did not dissuade the Apostolic community from believing in him or from proclaiming him to the world. For it had adopted the tradition that his death was redemptive. The community was convinced not only that he was innocent, but also that he died testifying to the truth.

The early Church tried to relate the death of Jesus to the Old Testament in two ways. Firstly, it looked upon his death as in itself a sacrifice, whereby the Jewish animal sacrifices in the temple had been done away with. Secondly, as a sacrifice it was a vicarious act intended to bring about the salvation of the whole world. The limited saving function of the Jewish sacrifice is now replaced by the cosmic salvation effected by the sacrifice on Calvary.

In addition to the Old Testament sacrificial system as a shadowy precursor of the death of Jesus on Calvary, the early Church saw in it a fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah 53. That the Suffering Servant of Yahweh was the model which Jesus had adopted for himself in his humiliation and death is a tradition acknowledged in early Christian tradition. In agreement with it Isaiah 53 was expounded as a prophecy concerning Jesus. It is to this tradition that Philip the evangelist referred in his meeting with the Ethiopian eunuch, as recorded in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. The eunuch was reading Isaiah 53 without grasping the meaning of the passage. Now Philip explained it by saying that it was a prophecy concerning Jesus in his suffering and death. The explanation made sense to the Ethiopian eunuch and he accepted it. The question whether by the concept of the "Suffering Servant of Yahweh" Deutero-Isiah had prophesied the suffering and death of Jesus was answered in the affirmative by the Christian community from the beginning by exercising the hermeneutic task in relation to itself and its tradition.

**His Resurrection foretold:** The tradition of the early Christian community was based on the proclamation that the sacrificial and vicarious death of Jesus had its triumph in his resurrection. This in fact was the foundation on which the early Church affirmed its faith and the Christian preachers proclaimed the Gospel. St. Paul who acknowledged this foundation of the Christian community in the light of his own conversion experience testifies that "if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain."

This proclamation, however, needed scriptural evidence to commend itself to the Jews. In his speech noted in Acts 2, Peter quotes Psalm 16: 8-11 in support of this Christian tradition. It may be relevant to refer here to the Syriac Peshitta version of Psalm 88: 10, which reads, Behold you do wonders for the dead; And warriors rise up and praise you.

The Hebrew reads: Dost thou work wonders for the dead?

Do the shades rise up to praise thee?

The verse corresponding to the Peshitta here may not have been known to Apostle Peter or to his reporter. In any case, the fact is that the Christian tradition saw in Psalm 16 a prophetic statement regarding the resurrection of the Messiah. Whether the Psalm did really say this is not an issue. The hermeneutic work which the Christian community adopted is this emphasis.

The illustrations noted above with reference to Jesus should be enough to show that the Christian community of the Apostolic times did not take hermeneutics as an independent enquiry. On crucial points in the Apostolic preaching the community could find bases in the Old Testament to defend its traditions in a way that would make sense to the believers.

## 2. The Church in the Graeco-Roman World and its Hermeneutics

This subject is not possible to be discussed here adequately at all. It being so vast, we shall merely touch on the question of Christ's person and two other important issues to see how the hermeneutic work came to be carried on by the Church of the Graeco-Roman world.

**The Person of Jesus Christ:** We have noted already, it is the proclamation concerning Jesus of Nazareth that led people of the various races of the Mediterranean world into the Church. Every community thus formed claimed to hold the faith which had been "once for all delivered to the saints," for which the Letter of Jude appeals its readers to contend. Any development on it was considered nothing but the spelling out of the same, under the guidance of the

Holy Spirit, in relation to questions raised in every generation. Apostle Paul sees it as the Gospel and insists that "even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed." Thus it was believed that everything contained in the Church was a legitimate development on the original deposit of faith, or the Gospel that had been preached from the beginning. All these emphases were substantiated by the hermeneutic work of the community.

The Messianic concept which commended the Gospel to Jewish audience was not sufficient enough to lead those outside its orbit to accept the faith. To them it was the concept of the *Logos* of Greek thought that appealed more. Though *Logos* had a special nuance of meaning for Greek thinkers, the Old Testament also had the term *word*, and the Hellenistic Jews had brought them together. Theological development in the Church of the Graeco-Roman world, following the New Testament itself, assumed Jesus Christ as a proper name, and took *Logos* as a crucial term for expounding his person. In this way the idea that Jesus Christ was God the Word incarnate could gain currency in Christian thinking.

**Difference in Traditions:** Communities everywhere were not in complete agreement in the matter of hermeneutics. The different hermeneutical approaches which the two ancient catechetical schools of Alexandria and Antioch had been adopting are well known. This difference between them led each of them to evolve its own tradition in interpreting the person of Christ, and this caused the division of the Church in the East on account of the fifth century councils. Behind that division which continues to this day, the relation of hermeneutics to community and its traditions is very clearly discernible in diverse ways.

The difference in hermeneutics on this issue between the two schools during the fifth century may be noted by referring to the crucial text used by the Alexandrines in support of their tradition. It was John 1: 14 "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The Alexandrine theologians took the verse to mean the *sarkosis* or *methbasronutho* of the Word, or God the Son, and affirmed the incarnation as a definitive event in which God the Son did in reality take upon himself an economy and led a human life in the world of time and space. He came down, or lowered himself in love, and raised manhood to himself. Thus Jesus Christ is the Lord in whom the salvation of the world has been accomplished once and for all. The Anthiochenes had another tradition. Insisting on the ultimate transcendence of God and the disparateness of God and man, they found it impossible to affirm God's lowering of himself and discarded *sarkosis* on the part of God as a fable. But they

acknowledged the definitiveness of the Christ event and the once-for-allness of the salvation. The exegesis they put on John 1: 14 was that the "became flesh" should be understood in the light of the "dwelt among us." Thus the text meant for them that God the Word dwelt in Jesus, the *homo assumptus*, from the very first moment of his conception in the womb of the Virgin. In this way, adopting a hermeneutical tradition different from that of the Alexandrines, the Antiochenes maintained that Jesus of Nazareth was a man, always and unceasingly, indwelt by God the Word. This indwelling was for them indeed unique, and not like the indwelling of God in a prophet or a saint. Moreover, it did not affect either the human reality or the growth and development of Jesus in any way. We can see here that each of these schools of theology defended the tradition built up by its community on the strength of its own hermeneutics.

This is not to say that these traditions accepted each other. On the contrary, each of them tried its best to declare itself exclusively the only valid interpretation of the faith. The position adopted by Severus of Antioch (d. 538 A. D.) will clarify the issue for us. A consistent critic of the Antiochene theology noted above and of the council of Chalcedon, he developed the Alexandrine point of view, meeting criticisms brought out against it. In the face of questions seeking justification for his doctrinal interpretation, Severus said that his teaching was exclusively the faith of the Church. As to how this was so, he argued that this was how the fathers have understood the scriptures within the tradition of the Church. The scriptures belong to the Church, which explain them. Hermeneutics should be carried on in the service of the Church.

This point is made in the West as well as in the East. The Vincentian Canon, to refer to one instance, insists on this very point. Faced with the one-sided emphasis of Augustine in his teaching on grace and predestination, Vincent of Lerins offers his view. He refers to the query: "The Canon of the Scriptures being complete and abundantly clear, why should there be an interpretation of the Church?" His answer is that the scriptures are taken in different ways by different persons, obviously implying that Augustine's use of the scriptures in support of his views could not be admitted, so that "we take the greatest care to hold THAT WHICH HAS BEEN BELIEVED EVERYWHERE, ALWAYS AND BY ALL." The hermeneutic work should be carried on only in the light of the community's universally maintained tradition.

**Papacy and Hermeneutics:** More important than the Vincentian Canon is the development of the Papacy in the history of the Western Church. The theory of a Petrine Office as being perpetuated in the Church through the see of Rome goes back clearly to late fourth

century. Pope Innocent I (402–417) wrote to the synod of African bishops in connection with the Pelagian controversy a letter in 417, condemning Pelagius. In it he asserts the papal theory in unmistakable terms:

With due care and propriety you consult the secrets of the Apostolic office that-office I mean, to which belongs besides the things that are without, the care of all the churches.... Especially as often as a question of faith is discussed, I think that all our brothers and fellow-bishops should refer to none other than to Peter, the author of their name and office...."

At the councils of Ephesus in 431 and Chalcedon in 451 the Roman legates in each of them made statements expressing almost the same view.

The Church in the West worked out the papal theory and established a tradition. In support of this theory it was argued that our Lord himself had appointed Peter with the authority to govern the Church, and that his office continued intact in the see of Rome. Scriptural texts, particularly Matthew 16: 13–20, are adduced in promoting the view. However, the interpretation built on these texts by those who accept the theory is at variance with the meaning seen in them by those who do not accept it. The point of view in this regard adopted by the Church in the East in general is noted in the 28th Canon of the Council of Chalcedon. Acknowledging Rome as the first major see in Christendom, this canon ascribed its primacy to its political importance as the capital of the Roman Empire.

Such differences in biblical exegesis among communities can be multiplied. What we can infer from them is that the scripture is not taken by any community in isolation from itself, or its traditions.

**Celibacy and Hermeneutics:** The relation of hermeneutics to community and its traditions can be still more clearly brought out by noting the exegesis built on passages which do not support celibacy. The monastic movement through which it asserted itself was of Eastern origin, and it is in the East that it had its uninhibited expression. The West took it over from the East and brought it under the service of the Church in different ways. Though the Protestant movement as a whole abandoned it, the rest of the Christian world in both the East and the West developed an attitude of extolling the celibate life over the married state. This is done by way of hermeneutics. The Virgin birth of Jesus Christ, the unmarried life which he lived, and some remarks of Apostle Paul in his Corinthian letters are believed to imply the superiority of celibacy over marriage.

This development has a history. The Virgin birth of Jesus Christ and the celibate life which he led have clear New Testament support. But it shows also that our Lord who was unmarried chose married men as his apostles, chief of whom was Peter, a married man. The obvious picture we have here is that marriage and celibacy are equally respectable vocations. This balance came to be modified with the emergence of the monastic movement, which introduced the idea that marriage was an inferior state. The way this emphasis is made in the Antiochene Syrian Church, in the writings of Gregory Bar Hebraeus of the thirteenth century may be noted. Man, he says, is a being composed of body and soul. The body leads him down to the earth and material things. The desire of the soul is for higher things, in whose pursuit lies man's real freedom. Though lawful marriage is good and permissible, particularly for the propagation of the race, it does not have the same spiritual status as celibacy. Marriage distracts man from the noble pursuit of the divine life.

In agreement with this emphasis the Church in the East, the Antiochene Syrian Church in particular, adopted its hermeneutics of a number of New Testament passages. Thus 1 Cor. 9: 5 is interpreted as implying that Peter and the other Apostles had their wives with them only as sisters; I Tim. 3: 2 and Titus 1: 6 as signifying that clergymen who happen to lose their wives by death should not marry again; and 1 Cor. 7: 5 as enjoining that husbands and wives should stay away from each other during the seasons of Lent and days of fasting.

Another important hermeneutical work to be considered in this context is that built on Matthew 1: 25— “he took his wife, but knew her not until she had borne a son.” The words “knew her not,” are interpreted in the Antiochene Syrian tradition, in the writings of Moses bar Kepha, a thirteenth century exegete. These words, he insists in his homily on Christmas, do not imply the idea that Joseph and Mary had physical union between them after the birth of Jesus. On the contrary, just as he had no conjugal relation with her before the child-birth, he did not have it thereafter either. That “he knew her not” refers to his lack of knowledge as to the fact that she was *Theotokos*. This he knew from the signs and wonders that happened subsequent to the child-birth. The exegesis can be neatly presented, and the tradition that Mary was ever-Virgin can be maintained to the satisfaction of the community.

The community assumed its character within the cultural and intellectual setting of its existence, and within suitable traditions. All the time the community was keen to relate the traditions so

evolved to the scriptures by means of hermeneutics which sounded plausible.

### **3. The Indian Church and Hermeneutics**

We have seen from the foregoing survey that the hermeneutic tradition of the Church in the Graeco-Roman world has passed through three stages. In the first stage, beginning with the Old Testament as its scripture, it proclaimed Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. Secondly, it confronted the Mediterranean world by adopting the *Logos* concept of Greek thought and commended Jesus Christ to the non-Jewish people. Thirdly, we have noted two developments—papacy in the West and an attitude of extolling celibacy over marriage in both the East and the West. The first two stages led the Church to acquire its character as a world religion. But the third is different. Neither the papal theory nor the extolling of celibacy over the marriage state can claim universal acceptance either in Christian thinking or in Church traditions. The Christian communities in India are themselves divided about their merits and legitimacy.

One point should be clear from what has been noted in this paper. The Christian communities in India have every right and responsibility to evolve hermeneutic traditions that are more convincing to the Indian mind. In doing this, at least two positions should be considered basic. Firstly, the Indian Church, like the Church of the Graeco-Roman world, does not take over any scripture over and above the Old and the New Testaments. Secondly, Christianity has already acquired its character on the foundation of the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the one and only Saviour of the world. This affirmation has other spiritual implications. The Indian Church is not going to change them. Its responsibility on the other hand is to commend this faith of the Church to the Indian people, as did the Church of the Mediterranean world to the people there.



# A Joyful Experience at Valamo

The International Orthodox Youth Festival and the Tenth General Assembly of Syndesmos. August 1—10. New Valamo, Finland

Deacon MATHEW VAIDYAN

At the joint initiative of the hierarchs of the Finnish Orthodox Church, and the member organizations of Syndesmos (World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth Movements), an International Orthodox Youth Festival was conducted at the Monastery of New Valamo in Finland (August 1—5, 1980) with the theme of "Witness and Service." More than 300 official delegates representing Orthodox Youth Organizations from about 30 countries (both Eastern and Oriental Orthodox) came together at Valamo establishing living contacts between Orthodox Youth Movements all over the world, praying, discussing, learning and sharing the "Valamo Spirit." In addition, there were observers from the World Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic Church and from many international organizations like the CEC, CPC, WSCF, EYCE, the Focolare Movement, the Philoxenia Fellowship etc.

The festival was inaugurated by Archbishop Paul of Karelia and all Finland. In his opening address His Eminence said: "You have come together in this festival of Orthodox Youth in order to get to know each other better and also in order to study circumstances where your Church is working; and in order to witness your faith and the reason of 'the hope that is in you' according to your common vocation....I put my trust in you, the Orthodox Youth. Your meeting will prove whether I have correctly understood the Orthodox of Today."

A keynote address was delivered on the theme of Witness and Service by Bishop John of Charlotte representative of His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch. Discussion groups with the following facilitators studied issues related to the main theme. The themes of the groups were:

Orthodoxy—the basics—(Fr. Matti Sidoroff, Finland)

The Role of Youth in the Church —(Mr. Georges Nahas,  
Lebanon)

Personal Life and Relationships (Mr. Gregory Dalack, USA)  
Obedience and Discipleship (Mr. Michel Sollogoub, France)  
Violence, War, Death (Mr. Chris Bender, USA)  
Science, Technology and Christian-  
Responsibility in Society (Deacon Mathew Vaidyan, India)  
Mission and Justice (Mrs. Marina, Finland)  
Churches and Countries (Mr. Jean Tchekan, France)  
My Vision and My Style of Life (Miss Outi Piirainen, Finland)  
Orthodoxy and Culture (Mr. Kwame Labi, Ghana)  
Renewal of the Community Spirit (Fr. Georges Metallinos,  
Greece)

Participants presented various aspects of Orthodox Witness and Service in their respective Churches by oral regional reports as well as by presentations including church music, slides, 'multivision' presentations, exhibitions, films, and so on. These audiovisual programmes about the life of Orthodox Churches and communities were highly inspiring and educative to the participants hailing from different cultures and backgrounds.

Dignitaries of both Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches sent messages greeting the participants of the Festival. Mr. Urho Kekkonen, President of Finland, also conveyed his greetings. Receptions were arranged by the Mayor of Kuopio and by the dignitaries of Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches in Finland.

Two important resolutions were accepted by the Youth Festival:

- ## 1. Resolution addressed to the Heads of the Eastern Orthodox Churches and the Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

"We the participants in the first Syndesmos World Orthodox Youth Festival, have been especially happy to note the presence among us of official representatives from youth and student movements of the Oriental Orthodox Churches. Being aware of the several preparatory meetings which have already taken place between theologians of the Eastern Orthodox Churches and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, we dare to request with the boldness prompted by our joyful experiences together here at Valamo, that the hierarchical authorities of the Eastern Orthodox Churches and the Oriental Orthodox Churches proceed with all haste possible to full unity between our Churches, thus healing another wound in the Body of Christ, and further fulfilling His mandate "That all may be one."

**2. Resolution addressed to the Holy Synods of the Orthodox Patriarchates and Autocephalous Churches.**

"We, the participants in the first Syndesmos World Orthodox Youth Festival, having among us many Orthodox young people from North America, Latin America, Australia and Western Europe, deplore the painful and uncanonical situation of the Orthodox Communities in these areas.

Too often temporal factors are allowed to divide Orthodox Christian living in the same area or nation, and these divisions become a major obstacle to the common witness of our one, holy, catholic and apostolic faith.

This situation of the so-called Diaspora is, of course, not new. It has been the subject of numerous discussions at all levels of church life, by bishops, theologians and by people. It was already the topic of a SYNDESMOS consultation in 1967, and it has been listed as the first item on the agenda of the forthcoming Great Council.

Confronted once again by this critical situation, we respectfully address this urgent appeal to the Holy Synods of our Orthodox Patriarchates and Autocephalous Churches, as well as to all Orthodox bishops; for a speedy resolution of this problem which continues to be a tragic spiritual burden to millions of Orthodox faithful."

Immediately after the International Orthodox Youth Festival, the Tenth General Assembly of Syndesmos was convened, the dates being August 6—10 and the venue also the Valamo Monastery.

A few points on Syndesmos are worth noting. It was founded in Paris in April, 1953, at an assembly of Youth and Clergy of different national Churches and jurisdictions of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The word 'Syndesmos' means a 'bond' or 'link'. We find this term in St. Paul: "And above all put on love, which is the bond of perfection" (Col. 3: 14), and "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit of the bond of peace" (Eph. 4: 3). The function of Syndesmos as it is portrayed in its Constitution reads:

(a) to be a bond of unity between the youth movements and organizations of the Orthodox Youth throughout the world and to organize such movements or organizations wherever possible.

(b) to promote among them a deeper understanding of the Orthodox Christian faith and a common vision of the tasks of the Orthodox Church in the modern world.

(c) to foster relations, co-operation and mutual aid between them in the realization of these tasks.

(d) to assist Orthodox Youth in their relations with other Christians and men of the other faiths.

(e) to be an instrument of furthering co-operation and deeper communion with the Oriental Orthodox Churches through common youth activities.

A General Assembly is convened at the end of each period of three years. At present the headquarters of Syndesmos work is Helsinki. In addition to regional activities, the leadership of Syndesmos has recently taken up projects such as the Witness and Service project, the Theological Education Project and the Kenya Youth Project. Its functions are communicated by a news letter called 'Syndesmos News' and by other periodicals.

The Tenth General Assembly at Valamo heard a main lecture on Witness, Service and Unity by Archbishop Kirill of Vyborg, Rector of the Leningrad Theological Academy. Reports were presented on Syndesmos activities as a whole and by the regions. Aiming at better planning for the next three years' programmes, commissions and committees were set up.

The Assembly made an important amendment in its Constitution Article 4, adding the words: "Associate membership is also granted to youth movements, organizations or theological schools of the Oriental Orthodox Churches." Though it was a step forward towards attaining full unity between the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches, it could not fulfill the expectation of the delegates from the Oriental Orthodox Churches. They expected that the General Assembly would take a bold step by deciding to propose affiliate (full) membership to the Youth Organizations of the Oriental Orthodox Churches. At the plenary meeting the representatives of the Oriental Orthodox Churches announced their hope that in the near future Syndesmos will take such a step in which mutual respect and equality among the Churches will be manifested.

New office-bearers were elected for Syndesmos at the General Assembly. Those who were elected include George Nahas, Lebanon (President); Archimandrite Augustin Nikitin, USSR, Marie Stachowitch, France; Gregory Dalack, USA, (Vice-Presidents) and Deacon Rauno Pietarinen, Finland (General Secretary).

Following the Youth Festival and the General Assembly, excursions were organized for the participants during five days to places of interest in various parts of Finland—including Kuopio, Karelia, Helsinki, Joensu and Northern Finland.

Both at the Festival and the Assembly, great emphasis was given to Orthodox life of worship, expressing the unity of Orthodoxy and purity of heart. Representing the Oriental Orthodox Churches the Indian delegation celebrated the Holy Liturgy at the main Church of the Valamo Monastery.

The "Two-weeks Love Feast" at Valamo which was described as 'the largest event in the history of Syndesmos' has attracted great interest even from others who do not belong to the present constituency of Syndesmos. The joyful experience together at Valamo can be explained by the following observations:

1. Orthodox Youth who belong to different jurisdictions and countries of varied backgrounds and political ideologies could come together, understand each other, know themselves better and strengthen their common efforts for witness and service.

2. The presence and contributions of the delegates from the Oriental Orthodox Churches created a sense of thirst for full unity between the two families of the Orthodox Churches. The Youth Festival hopefully passed a resolution (quoted above) addressed to the heads of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches. The Syndesmos Assembly though it could have taken a bold step by proposing full membership for the Oriental Orthodox Youth Organizations, took a primary step for unity making an amendment in its constitution. It is of much importance that, among the accepted priorities for the future functions of Syndesmos in the next period of three years, the first one is to engage in further deep contact with the Youth Organizations of Oriental Orthodox Churches aiming at full unity between the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches.

3. The presence of representatives at Valamo from a number of non-Orthodox international organizations and the joyful experience together proved one thing. By these increasing ecumenical contacts and with a more complete understanding of the various Christian Youth Movements now operating, the Orthodox Youth can in future be able to better comprehend, initiate and direct actions among Christians for world peace, development and justice. Thus the Orthodox Youth will be able more fully to witness to the salvation in Christ, which is for all mankind, and to serve the Lord better who calls all mankind to union in and with Christ.

4. There are many internal problems among the various jurisdictions and authorities in the Orthodox Youth, yet to be solved. Divisions and conflicts which evolved in the situation of the so-called Diaspora are, of course, obstacles to the common witness of the Orthodox Church—one, holy, catholic and apostolic. The Orthodox

Youth who came together at Valamo discussed this painful situation and showed great concern for solving these problems. The Assembly passed a resolution addressed to the Holy Synods of Orthodox Patriarchates and Autocephalous Churches aiming at a speedy resolution of this problem. This "hope for a hopeful future" makes the statement relevant: "Who can deny the fact that it is the youth who bring change"?

5. The Spiritual atmosphere prevailed at the Valamo Monastery made an unforgettable impression on the participants. There were daily celebrations of the Holy Eucharist, and the whole conference was Worship-oriented. New Valamo which continues the tradition of the Old Monastery of Valamo founded in the 12th century on the shores of Lake Ladoga, with the intercession of the local saints Sergius and Herman of Valamo, with the presence of the famous Valamo icon of the Mother of God inspired and still inspires the Orthodox Youth who came together from various parts of the world.

Let us hope that Syndesmos, which is a "good servant to the Church" and an instrument in her mission among youth, will be really able to fulfill its role as the international bond of unity between Orthodox Youth—both Eastern and Oriental.

# News and Views

## W. C. C. Statement on Nuclear Disarmament\*

The Central Committee heard the message from the Melbourne Conference which spoke of the "clouds of nuclear threat and annihilation" and that from the Conference on Faith, Science and the Future which reminded it that the gravest danger that humanity faces today is a nuclear holocaust. It is with a great sense of urgency that the Central Committee makes this statement.

Developments in the recent period have brought the world closer to the brink of a nuclear war. Unless the present trends are reversed or immediately halted, a nuclear war is now a distinct possibility. Many scientists are convinced that in the past year the hands of the clock have moved closer to the midnight of nuclear war.

The tension between the USA and the USSR has increased. They have each developed and continue to develop new generations of ever-more devastating nuclear weapons. The dangers inherent in the deployment of these weapons within Europe have been heightened by the NATO decision to base new missiles possessing counterforce qualities and exceptional accuracy.

In August 1980 the United States officially announced a new policy which contemplates a "limited" nuclear war. This has further raised the anxieties about a nuclear holocaust. The current weapon programme of the major powers, if not stopped, will pull the nuclear trip-wire tighter. The development of "nuclear war-fighting capabilities" will increase the hair-trigger readiness for massive nuclear exchange at a time when political tensions are increasing all over the world.

Many years ago the USA, the UK and the USSR agreed to negotiate a treaty banning all nuclear tests. Regrettably no draft of such a comprehensive test ban treaty has been presented. Neither China nor France has indicated willingness to enter into such an agreement.

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\* The above text was adopted by the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches at its meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 14-22 August 1980.

The deliberations at the Second Review Conference on Non-Proliferation Treaty currently being held in Geneva have highlighted the fact that the nuclear weapon states which have signed the treaty have failed to fulfil their obligations under the treaty to start nuclear disarmament, thus undermining the credibility of the non-proliferation regime.

The Central Committee urges all nuclear powers to:

- (a) freeze immediately all further testing, production and deployment of nuclear weapons and of missiles and new aircraft designed primarily to deliver nuclear weapons;
- (b) start immediately discussions with a view to making agreements not to enhance the existing nuclear potentials and progressively reducing the overall number of nuclear weapons and a speedy conclusion of a comprehensive test ban treaty.

The Central Committee also urges an early ratification of the SALT II agreement.

In view of the possibility of nuclear war, the Central Committee urges the Madrid Conference (on European Security and Cooperation) to decide to start negotiations on nuclear disarmament.

#### **W. C. C. Statement on Jerusalem\***

1. On the basis of previous WCC statements the Central Committee opposes the Israeli unilateral action of annexing East Jerusalem and uniting the city as its "eternal capital" under its exclusive sovereignty.

2. This decision is contrary to all pertinent UN resolutions. It most dangerously undermines all efforts towards the just solution of the Middle East problem and thus jeopardizes regional and world peace.

3. The Central Committee reiterates the statement on Jerusalem issued by the WCC Assembly in Nairobi, 1975, which stressed that the tendency to minimize Jerusalem's importance for any of the three monotheistic religions should be avoided. The destiny of Jerusalem should be viewed in terms of people including Christians as well as

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Jews and Muslims and not only in terms of shrines. Therefore, just as the future status of Jerusalem has been considered part of the destiny of the Jewish people, so it cannot be considered in isolation from the destiny of the Palestinian people, and should thus be determined within the general context of the settlement of the Middle East conflict in its totality.

**4.** The Central Committee calls the member Churches to exert through their respective governments all pressure on Israel to withhold all action on Jerusalem, the future of which should be included in the agenda of official negotiations involving Israel and the Palestinian people on self-determination and on the solution of the Middle East conflict.

**5.** Recognizing that Jerusalem is a focus of the deepest religious inspiration and attachment for all Christians in the world, the Central Committee urges the WCC to undertake an active role in expressing the concerted Christian voice and to aid churches in fully assuming their role as partners in deciding the future character of Jerusalem.

**6.** The Central Committee also urges the General Secretary to explore, in consultation with member churches in the area and the Vatican, possibilities of trying to find the best solution to the problem of Jerusalem through all appropriate and effective means and ways such as convening jointly or separately international consultations or any other approaches or actions on Jerusalem. The General Secretary should also explore possibilities of consultations with the Muslim and Jewish communities concerned with the future character of Jerusalem in order to seek ways to consolidate justice and human co-existence in the City of Peace.

### **3. Russian Orthodox Church Leader Responds to WCC's Concern over Trials of Christians in Soviet Union**

A public letter to the Russian Orthodox Church expressing the World Council of Churches' concern at recent trials of Christians in the Soviet Union has been described by the Russian Church as a "positive approach."

Signed by Metropolitan Juvenaly, chairman of the Department of External Affairs of the Moscow Patriarchate, in response to the WCC's 1 October letter the Russian reply takes issue with the arguments of the World Council but promises nevertheless to pass them on to the relevant state authorities and also to seek further and more detailed information on the trials.

Receipt of the Russian Church's reply points to a willingness to share more widely a dialogue with the WCC on difficult issues. This exchange began in 1962 after the Russian Orthodox Church entered the WCC and has grown considerably in mutual openness and trust.

Metropolitan Juvenaly's reply describes the attitudes and actions of his Church towards these and regrets that such issues as human rights and religious freedom in his society are often "extremely distorted" by Western information agencies "in the spirit of so-called psychological warfare."

The Russian Church's reply considers the effects of the trials on the Madrid talks, a dialogue that it hopes will lead to full implementation of the Helsinki Agreement, and the "cherished goal of disarmament."

(Courtesy—EPS)

# THE STAR OF THE EAST

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